

Opening Remarks by

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Delivered at the

**Agricultural Outlook Forum 2008**

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**Good morning. I'm Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Conner and it's my pleasure to open the 2008 Agricultural Outlook Forum.**

**Speaking for Secretary Schafer and USDA's World Agricultural Outlook Board, I'm delighted to extend a warm welcome to everyone here in Arlington, Virginia and those watching the webcast of these events.**

**My thanks to Jerry Bange, chairman of the World Agricultural Outlook Board, Brenda Chapin, and the Steering and Program Committees for the tremendous work that went into this program.**

**USDA's Outlook Forum is an opportunity for experts in economics, industry, policy, science and government to explore the future. This year, I'm pleased to say, we have a registration of more than 1600 and climbing.**

**I can promise you an exciting agenda over these two days. More than 130 speakers will build on last year's theme. Keeping energy at the forefront, they'll discuss renewables and innovations in the solar and wind industries. They'll also examine issues ranging from food safety and conservation to emerging environmental markets.**

**Secretary Ed Schafer will present the keynote address on how we can adjust our farm policies to reflect the changes technology is bringing to agriculture and use them to build a stronger rural economy.**

**We're privileged to have Stephen Johnson, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, as our guest speaker.**

**Following him, Jean-Mari Peltier of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives will lead a distinguished panel in a discussion of agriculture's response to changing market forces.**

**She'll be joined by leaders of some of the nation's biggest agribusinesses and trade groups.**

**They are C. Larry Pope of Smithfield Foods ... Tom Stenzel of the United Fresh Produce Association ... Paul Schickler of DuPont and Pioneer Hi-Bred ... and Robert Dinneen of the Renewable Fuels Association.**

**Last year, we introduced the Outlook Diversity Program. This year we're delighted to welcome even more students—17 junior and senior students from land-grant universities.**

**My appreciation to the sponsoring organizations ... and special thanks to Dr. Ahmed Jilani from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, for your help with this program.**

**As always, the Forum offers plenty of give-and-take. We will have five concurrent sessions exploring *Rural America, Trade and Farm Policy, Energy and Technology, Food Risk and Security, and Conservation.***

**There are a number of compelling issues guiding the discussions this year.**

**Farm legislation continues to be debated on Capitol Hill. Speakers will consider the potential impact of the farm bill on areas like risk management and conservation.**

**International experts will offer their perspectives on the ongoing Doha negotiations and trade liberalization.**

**Even traditional topics—like commodities and farm income—have greater significance this year in light of rising commodity prices.**

**So these two days will lay out issues on all our minds as speakers probe some of the major forces shaping agriculture today.**

**I also want to put in a plug for this evening's dinner program where I'll be sharing some of the lessons on agriculture and life I've learned by having a ring-side seat—and even spending a good amount of time inside the ropes—through six farm bills.**

**And now, opening this Forum with the outlook for agricultural, trade and policy prospects—and a future view of rural America—are three of USDA's highest officials.**

**They are key advisers in matters of agricultural economics, production agriculture, trade and rural development.**

**They are widely respected throughout the agriculture community for the insight and analysis they've brought to USDA decisions made on behalf of America's farmers and ranchers.**

**Leading the Outlook Forum, for the first time, is USDA's newly appointed Chief Economist, Joe Glauber. Dr. Glauber has been deputy chief economist for the past 15 years.**

**He succeeds Keith Collins, who retired in December. Most of you know Dr. Collins as an anchor at USDA in his long tenure as Chief Economist and we're delighted that he's here in the audience. Keith, would you stand?**

**Most recently, Joe Glauber been Special Doha Agricultural Envoy at the office of the U.S. Trade Representative and will continue his work as chief agricultural negotiator in the Doha talks.**

**Mark Keenum joined USDA's leadership team just over a year ago as Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services.**

**He served for 17 years in the office of Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi, including a decade as the Senator's Chief of Staff.**

**In that time, Dr. Keenum worked on three farm bills ... experience that's been vital to USDA's work on the farm bill now before Congress.**

**In the past year, he has been involved in efforts to reopen export markets to U.S. beef, in agriculture discussions for the Doha Round, and in trade aspects of the farm bill now being negotiated by Congress.**

Sounding the theme of this conference, Under Secretary Thomas Dorr will talk about “Promoting a Rural Renaissance.” As Under Secretary for Rural Development, Mr. Dorr leads an agency with a cumulative loan portfolio that now exceeds \$100 billion invested in rural housing infrastructure and business development.

He has worked to streamline Rural Development’s offices and programs, accelerate the deployment of rural broadband, and modernize our rural Critical Access Hospitals.

As Chairman of the USDA Energy Council, Mr. Dorr is a champion of renewable fuels and the promise of energy from agriculture.

Ladies and gentlemen, Joe Glauber, Mark Keenum and Thomas Dorr ...

I now have the pleasure of introducing the gentleman who has recently taken the reins of USDA.

It was less than four weeks ago that Ed Schafer was sworn in as USDA’s 29<sup>th</sup> Secretary. But already some things have become very clear.

This man has a deep connection to the people of rural America. He takes every chance he gets to thank the people of North Dakota—where he was governor for two terms—for shaping and encouraging his life.

Secretary Schafer has a passion for putting technology together with the people whose lives it will improve. When he looks to the future of rural America, he sees progress in terms of telecommunications, telemedicine and distance education.

**With roots in agriculture and business, Ed Schafer devoted his years as governor to bringing job growth and economic expansion to the state and revitalizing its rural areas.**

**In just a few weeks heading up USDA, Secretary Schafer has already had his trial by fire, plunging into difficult farm bill negotiations and guiding the largest beef recall in history.**

**On a personal note, I want to say that I'm delighted to work with and get to know Ed Schafer ... and introduce him to all of you and the Outlook Forum.**

**Ladies and gentlemen, Secretary Ed Schafer ...**